



MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

**NOAA
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION**

September 2002

GLOUCESTER, MA OFFICE, ONE BLACKBURN DRIVE, GLOUCESTER, MA 01930

NEW EMPLOYEE

On September 11 Mike Johnson joined the Northeast Region's Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) in Gloucester. His new duties for HCD will involve Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) related issues and permit/federal project reviews, including possible development of EFH programmatic consultations for various activities in New England. Mike worked for the Southeast Regional Office's HCD in the Miami Area Office for seven years, where he was responsible for reviewing regulatory permits and federal actions in the southeast Florida region. A major component of the federal actions reviewed in the region included beach nourishment, port expansion, and large navigation projects that often involved significant adverse impacts on submerged aquatic vegetation, coral reef, hard bottom, and reef fish habitats. Prior to coming to work for NOAA Fisheries, he was employed with the Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI) in Cedar Key and Marathon, Florida. While at FMRI he carried out fisheries independent monitoring and life history research on a number of fish species, including Gulf flounder, hogfish, and various snapper and grouper species. Mike looks forward to meeting all of the various agency staff working in the region and learning more about New England fishery habitats and resources. (Mike.R.Johnson@noaa.gov , 978/ 281-9130)

HUBLINE AND MARITIMES PIPELINE PERMIT REVIEW COMPLETE

Nearly two years of review have been finalized as the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) has agreed to all NOAA Fisheries EFH conservation recommendations. Of particular interest is that the applicant will be responsible for recapturing drilling mud resulting from horizontal direction drilling, restoring hard bottom habitat where possible, providing mitigation for unavoidable construction impacts, and additional compensatory mitigation based on a monitoring recovery plan. (Sean.McDermott@noaa.gov , 978/ 281-9113)

BOSTON HARBOR DREDGING

The ACOE, in partnership with the Massachusetts Port Authority, has started looking at the feasibility of deepening the main shipping channels in the port of Boston to a depth greater than the current authorized 40-foot depth. Although the ACOE recently completed dredging of

Boston Harbor, the main shipping channel was not dredged, and now maintenance dredging is necessary in order to provide adequate depth for larger cargo vessels. The main harbor entrance channel from Broad Sound, through President Roads, and up to the marine terminal just seaward of the Ted Williams Tunnel will be examined for deepening to about 45 feet, as will the Reserved Channel. In addition, a small area of the Mystic River Channel will be examined to determine the feasibility of increasing the depth to 40 feet. The feasibility study will include the preparation of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, take about three years to complete, and cost approximately \$4 million. (David.MacDuffee@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9319)

JAMES J. HOWARD MARINE SCIENCES LABORATORY, HIGHLANDS, NJ 07732

DELAWARE BASIN FISHERIES

On September 30 Stan Gorski attended the Delaware Basin Fisheries Technical Committee held in West Trenton, New Jersey. Issues discussed included interstate river herring management, an American shad population estimate as mandated by ASMFC, and management options to improve Atlantic sturgeon population numbers. However, a major highlight of the meeting centered around the draft revised seasonal restrictions document for dredging, blasting, and overboard disposal. Highlights of the document were presented at the American Fisheries Society meeting in Baltimore on August 22. As was agreed by tech committee members, copies of the draft were sent to key staff of the Philadelphia District, ACOE for comment. District staff presented comments and they will be incorporated into the document for a final revision. (**Stan Gorski, 732/ 872-3037**)

NEW YORK HARBOR ENTRANCE CHANNELS

On September 24 Stan Gorski met with representatives of the New York District, ACOE and with representatives of Amboy Aggregates, Inc. to discuss sand and aggregate excavation for Sandy Hook Channel. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss NMFS' recommendations to preclude aggregate excavation from January 1 to May 31 in order to protect winter flounder eggs and newly metamorphosed juveniles. (**Stan Gorski, 732/ 872-3037**)

STONE HARBOR BOROUGH

The back bay dredging and restoration of the point at Stone Harbor Borough has become a threat to the local marine habitat. After careful and tedious planning by state and federal agencies, the borough has been found non-compliant with the special conditions of their permit to remove those portions of contaminated dredged material out of the temporary confined disposal facility to an upland site. The concern is that storms may disperse the material and that the restoration was to be initiated by November 1, 2002 and completed by February 15, 2003. The Philadelphia District, ACOE has stated that if this is not done, the case will be referred to the United States Attorney's Office to complete removal of the material. (anita.riportella@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3116)

CONNECTIV

Habitat staff met with Conectiv, Inc., their consultants and state and federal agencies to discuss

the proposed Cedar to Ship Bottom submarine 69 KV cable crossing in Manahawkin Bay in New Jersey. Historically, the bay has supported eelgrass beds, and NMFS' guidance has been to route the cable to avoid the eelgrass. Aerial hyperspectral imagery technology employed for this project, along with ground truthing, promises to enable the installation of the cable with disruption of little or no eelgrass. (anita.riportella@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3116)

MILFORD, CT OFFICE, 212 ROGERS AVENUE, MILFORD, CT 06460

MILLENNIUM PIPELINE UPDATE

Proponents for this natural gas pipeline project have requested a meeting with the Regional Office to discuss several issues related to the ongoing ESA Section 7 and EFH consultations. As indicated in previous highlights, these consultations were expanded to include a new proposal to perform blasting in eastern Haverstraw Bay. The project proponents also have filed an appeal of the decision by New York State to deny the project Coastal Zone consistency. Information concerning this appeal can be found at: <http://www.ogc.doc.gov/czma.htm> . In addition, a public hearing related to the appeal has been set in Tarrytown, New York in November, 2002.

(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

VERIZON TO INSTALL FIBEROPTIC CABLE TO ADDRESS SERVICE BOTTLENECK

Verizon Communications, Inc. has applied for Department of the Army authorization to construct a fiberoptic cable across the Hudson River between the City of Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County and the Town of Highland, Ulster County, New York. This project is designed to address a significant service bottleneck between the New York City and Albany switching areas. The cable crossing is proposed to be constructed in less than one day using a slit trenching technology. All coordination with NOAA/NMFS has been concluded.

(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

NEPA REVIEW BEGINS FOR ANOTHER NATURAL GAS PIPELINE CROSSING OF LONG ISLAND SOUND

Staff have received the draft environmental impact statement for the Eastern Long Island Extension Project, a natural gas pipeline proposed between Milford, Connecticut and Shoreham, New York. Proposed by the Iroquois Gas Transmission Systems, L.P., this interstate pipeline is intended to provide some 175,000 dekatherms per day of natural gas from supply areas in the Northeast to energy markets in Long Island and New York City. Comments on this project will be forthcoming to the FERC in October. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

PRELIMINARY COORDINATION WITH ACOE ON PROPOSED SPUR TO HUDSON RIVER FEDERAL NAVIGATION PROJECT

Section 110 of the September 1996 Energy and Water Appropriations Act authorized the design and construction of a 300-foot wide spur to the existing Hudson River Federal Navigation Project (HRFNP) in the vicinity of Hudson City Light and the north dock at Athens, New York. The project is intended to permit deep draft vessels to two commercial terminals in Athens, New York. This community lies on the west side of the Hudson, approximately opposite Middle

Ground Flats, and is within the Vosburgh Swamp and Middle Ground Flats coastal fish and wildlife habitat designated by New York's Coastal Management Program. If constructed as presently proposed, the project would entail removal of 1.3 million cubic yards of material and subsequent disposal at Houghtaling Island. The area proposed to be modified by construction of the Athens spur to the HRFNP is an important concentration and spawning area for American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*). This area also provides spawning, nursery, and feeding habitat for striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*), blueback herring (*Alosa aestivalis*), white perch (*Morone americana*), and a variety of freshwater species. Based upon the preliminary information, it appears that this proposal will impair the habitat generally by altering water depths, potentially changing local erosion and accretion patterns and compromising the local carrying capacity for recruitment of shad and other species.

(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

The National Park Service has issued an environmental assessment for personal water craft use at Fire Island National Seashore. Comments on this environmental assessment are due in early November, 2002. Staff will review and comment on this document as time and workload permit.

(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

DOCK REPAIRS PROPOSED AT U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY

The Department of the Army seeks to repair the South Dock substructure and construct new mooring dolphins at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York. Habitat Conservation Division staff have requested additional information concerning this request, which proposes extensive use of creosoted timber elements. It is our position that precast concrete or other non-polluting materials are preferable because they would eliminate introduction of organic contaminants such as PAHs and would have a longer useful lifespan than creosoted timber.

(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

ORCHARD BEACH RESTORATION PROJECT

The New York District, ACOE produced a draft Re-evaluation Report and Draft Environmental Assessment to investigate the feasibility and extent of possible federal participation in restoring and stabilizing the public recreational beach at Orchard Beach, Borough of The Bronx, New York. Generally, the project entails initial placement of 265,000 cubic yards of sand, with an additional 153,000 cubic yards of beach fill to the design profile, 78,000 cubic yards for a one foot construction tolerance and 33,750 cubic yards of material for what is being termed "advance renourishment." Comments on this DEIS have been delayed due to FTE limitations at the Milford Field Office. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

INTERAGENCY MEETING CONCERNING WIND FARMS HELD IN ALBANY

Staff participated in an interagency meeting to discuss the regulatory requirements for a series of wind farm projects being proposed by Winergy, LLC in coastal New York. The meeting entailed a preliminary presentation by the project proponents about sites under consideration for development in New York waters, followed by discussions with state and federal agency personnel on their anticipated information requirements for the proposals. A strawman proposal for an environmental impact assessment scope also was circulated. Winergy is a Long Island-based company that is interested in procuring the necessary permits for offshore wind power

facilities. They hope to secure the necessary authorizations for projects in the Northeast U.S. in three to five years after the appropriate applications have been submitted. They will be meeting with regulatory and resource agencies beyond the immediate New York area in the coming months. Additional information is available at their website: <http://www.winergyllc.com>. Habitat Conservation Division staff will be participating in review of individual projects as they formally come on line through our customary regulatory review processes that engage us with the ACOE, state Coastal Management programs and other involved public sector entities. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

NEW YORK HARBOR NAVIGATION CHANNEL

The New York District, ACOE is advancing the creation of the New York Harbor 50 foot deep navigation channel along several fronts. The state and federal partners in the project are seeking ways to consolidate deepening activities. By consolidating the ongoing deepening of the 41/45 foot and the proposed 50 foot projects into single excavations in the Kill Van Kull and Arthur Kill reaches, the length of time necessary to attain the 50-foot depth is reduced as are the environmental impacts and costs. We are seeing these benefits in two principal areas; blasting and soft sediments extraction. Using the consolidation, rock removal in the channel can be accomplished in a single effort with fewer explosives and a significant reduction in time and cost. We expect that the reduced blasting time savings may be as large as a year. With the dredging, the time savings will be measured in months. Both time savings will come during periods when spawning by such species as winter flounder are at their peak. The savings were obtained by using a combination of customized State Water Quality Certification under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act and the Essential Fish Habitat elements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and relying on the cooperation of the New York District and Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The success of effort is a result of the partnering and cooperation of the parties. (Michael.Ludwig@NOAA.gov , 203/ 882-6594)

UTILITY LINE INSTALLATIONS

Utility line installations in aquatic settings continue to represent a major component of the workload in the Metro-New York region. We are actively discussing five gas pipelines and three sets of electric cables, all with bi-state interconnections in the waters off Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York. The largest is the Blue Atlantic proposal which would carry Sable Island gas to the Metro-New York region. The 36-inch line would traverse the continental shelf for approximately 750 miles, approaching some of the most productive fishing grounds in the world. Electric cable installations run the gamut from replacements for existing sets that are leaking their coolant, to new installations designed to improve the interconnection and distribution of Canadian, New York and New England electric power. With these proposals comes a significant need to understand the design, operation, and consequences of the installation and operation procedures. To address all these issues and the concern that the seabed could begin to look something like a plate of spaghetti, we are pursuing the concept of “passive presence” for utility lines. Passive presence requires burial and seafloor restoration in as timely a manner as practicable. With trenching, jetting, plowing, and blasting the four main techniques being employed by project proponents, NMFS has reached out to any and all sources of information that might provide insights. One of the best sources has been the utility companies. We have gathered clear evidence that water depth, installation technique, and sediment character are critical components in the “rate of recovery” story. Side scan SONAR and aerial photography

have provided visual evidence that sediment structure in the insertion zone along submerged utility lines do not normally return to pre-existing conditions. Instead, it appears to contain an elevated level of fine-grained and organically enriched materials that have a hypoxic or even anoxic signature. Additionally, the benthic topography in the disrupted areas remains altered for decades. We are now exploring techniques to overcome these disruptions.

(Michael.Ludwig@NOAA.gov, 203/ 882-6594)

OXFORD, MD OFFICE, 904 SOUTH MORRIS STREET, OXFORD, MD 21654

CRANEY ISLAND EXPANSION

Craney Island, located near the mouth of the James River, Portsmouth, Virginia, is a 2500 acre federal dredged material containment site constructed between 1956 and 1958. Under current management conditions, approximately 4.8 million cubic yards are deposited each year. However, deepening the Norfolk channel to 55 feet is authorized, which will increase the annual demand to 10 million cubic yards. Studies to expand Craney Island were initiated in the 1980s, but were suspended when improved management techniques were implemented. Feasibility studies were resumed in 2000 and should be completed in 2003. Expansion options range from approximately 600 to 950 acres. Obviously, resource issues are significant. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5771)**

EXOTIC OYSTERS IN CHESAPEAKE BAY

The introduction of non-indigenous oysters (*Crassostrea ariakensis*) into Chesapeake Bay by the Virginia Seafood Council was formally proposed in an application to the ACOE in June 2002, which sparked considerable controversy among the bay stakeholders, including NMFS. As a result of the issues raised, the National Academy of Science was contracted through the Chesapeake Bay Program to assess the potential impacts on indigenous oysters, water quality, habitat, and the spread of oyster and human disease, both within the bay and adjacent coastal areas. The project will be completed in October 2003. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5771)**